

Is Cuba About to Join the Warsaw Pact?

By PAUL SCOTT

Cuba appears to be moving toward active membership in the Warsaw Pact.

Although there has been no public announcement of Havana's membership, Cuban representatives now attend all diplomatic and military meetings of the Moscow-directed alliance of Eastern European nations.

Most recent example of Cuba's participation in a Warsaw Pact meeting was in Bucharest. Diplomats of nations in the Communist alliance met there on August 26 and 27 to work out the "united stand" their governments would take at the coming United Nations' General Assembly meeting in New York.

In noting participants taking part in the Bucharest meeting, the official communiqué listed the names of the Cuban delegation along with other Warsaw Pact members. These included Russia, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Rumania. No other Communist nations were represented.

Other reports from behind the Iron Curtain reveal that Cuban military officers have been seen taking part in Warsaw Pact military planning sessions and field maneuvers. Several high-ranking Cuban military officers also have been spotted at the Warsaw Pact headquarters in Moscow and Warsaw. In recent weeks Warsaw Pact officers have turned up in Cuba as advisers to Fidel Castro's government.

What makes these Warsaw Pact links significant are that they come at a time Russia has begun to increase its control over Cuba's economy and military forces. Foreign diplomats in Havana report that Soviet military and economic advisers are now seen everywhere. They are in the cities and the country.

An estimated 15,000 Russians, the largest number since the 1962 missile crisis, are now in Cuba and their numbers are increasing monthly. Latest U.S. military intelligence estimate lists 50 Soviet generals and admirals as being in Cuba.

Reports from Cuban refugees are that Moscow intends to take over the management of all factories producing for export, regardless of their size or importance. Soviet influence is also on the rise in the management of agricultural and fishing co-operatives, mines, oil exploration, and power. The U.S. State Department says the U.S. is losing control of Cuba's transportation system.

On the military side, Russians now control or operate five major air bases in Cuba. An estimated 250 Russian pilots are now stationed at these bases along with their aircraft.

A total of 10 Russian-operated "oceanographic vessels" are patrolling or on station at all times in the Caribbean. Units of the Soviet fleet, including missile-carrying surface vessels and nuclear submarines, now appear regularly in Cuban waters. Several have put into Cuban ports and used their repair facilities.

American intelligence experts are sharply split over the reasons for the increased Russian activities in Cuba. Central Intelligence Agency officials claim Moscow is tightening control over Cuba in order to keep that country's economy from deteriorating any further.

Military intelligence officials argue that may be one of the reasons, but not the most important one. They stress that the latest build-up of Soviet personnel in Cuba came after Russia's Defense Minister Andrei Grechko visited Havana earlier this year.

These military intelligence experts contend that the Russians are shoring up Castro's economy as part of a program to turn Cuba into one big Communist air and sea base in the heart of the Western Hemisphere.

In support of their argument, they cite the recent "large shipments" of Soviet military equipment, including hundreds of additional surface-to-air missiles.

In 1962 the shipment to Cuba of large numbers of Russian surface-to-air missiles were the forerunner of deliveries of 1,200-mile range, ground-to-ground ballistic missiles which touched off a major U.S.-Soviet confrontation.

It is in this context of new and past Soviet activities that Cuba's new ties to the Warsaw Pact are being studied at the highest levels of the Nixon Administration.

From Western observers recently in Cuba comes this latest word on Castro's current woes: Rationing is severe and getting worse. Havana is becoming a run-down city with most of its buildings in need of repair. It is now a city without craftsmen, shops, or bars.

Power in Cuba now rests in the country's Soviet-trained and equipped armed forces, which are still loyal to Castro. Of the 21 Cabinet posts in the government, more than half are held by military men.

Work cards have become the most important personal document in Cuba. They certify that the holder is steadily employed. Without one, a person is subject to forced labor at a place designated by the government.

The Cuban government has introduced "work norms," a Soviet planning measure of the 1930s, for the production record of each worker.

A former Cuban official who defected to the U.S. recently has told the Senate Internal Security subcommittee that Castro once suggested to a group of radical American Negroes that they should kill Dr. Martin Luther King. Francisco Antonio Teira Alfonso, the defector, reported that the incident took place in Havana several months before King was assassinated.

Castro's latest pamphlet, "A Mini-manual on Urban Guerrilla Warfare" has begun to show up on college campuses. The pamphlet is being distributed by members of the Venceremos Brigade (students being trained in Cuba). Members of the Venceremos Brigade are now quietly taking over a number of the radical anti-war groups in the U.S.